

# THE ISIS DEN *in* AMERICA

*Real-World Clusters*

The role of social media in recent developments in the jihadist scene is central, but in some cases it is matched or even exceeded by important real-world dynamics.

These sympathizers did not begin their radicalization trajectories alone in front of a computer screen, but rather via face-to-face interactions through preexisting social contacts who already embraced jihadist ideology.

Over time, these individuals tend to form a cluster: a small informal group of like-minded individuals whose internal dynamics reinforce the beliefs of its members.

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**ISIS IN  
AMERICA**  
FROM RETWEETS  
TO RAQQA

## ST. LOUIS

**KEY INDIVIDUAL** Abdullah Ramo Pazara, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Bosnia

**BACKGROUND** A veteran of the Bosnian civil war, Pazara came to America in the 1990s. After his marriage and business unraveled, he developed an interest in a literalist interpretation of Islam. In 2013, he left for Syria, where he commanded a Balkan-dominated ISIS battalion.

**CLUSTER FORMATION** Pazara was supported by a group of Bosnian Americans, including a handful who hailed from the same Bosnian town. The group purchased supplies for his battalion and raised money for Pazara and the families of other ISIS fighters from the Balkans. Authorities dismantled the group in February 2015, arresting six individuals on terrorism-related charges. Pazara was reported killed while fighting in Kobane.

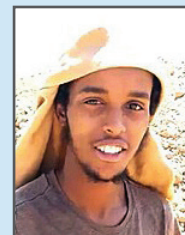


## MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL

**KEY INDIVIDUAL** Abdi Nur, a Somali American who joined ISIS in 2014 and then offered fake passports and contact information to his friends back in Minnesota

**BACKGROUND** From 2007–2009, nearly two dozen individuals, mostly ethnic Somalis, left the U.S. to join the terrorist group al Shabaab.

**CLUSTER FORMATION** In 2014, a number of Somali Americans shifted their focus from Somalia to Syria. Since then, at least 15 individuals have joined or tried to join ISIS on the ground, relying on the established network of al Shabaab supporters. Many grew up in the same community, attended the same schools, and worshiped at the same mosque. Several had family or friends connected to al Shabaab.



## NEW YORK CITY/NEW JERSEY

**KEY INDIVIDUAL** Nader Saadeh, a New Jersey resident of Jordanian/Palestinian descent

**CLUSTER FORMATION** In 2012, then-teenage Saadeh shared his jihadist sympathies with Munther Omar Saleh, a like-minded teenager from Queens. Two years later, he involved his older brother Alaa Saadeh and Samuel Topaz, a convert to Islam of mixed Jewish/Dominican descent from Fort Lee, N.J. Saleh soon incorporated Staten Island's Fareed Mumuni. The five discussed and shared ISIS propaganda both online and off.

**ARREST** By the spring of 2015, the group had cemented their plans to join ISIS, unaware that they had been under FBI surveillance for months. Nader successfully traveled to Amman but was arrested by Jordanian authorities. In the wake of his capture, the FBI arrested the cluster's four remaining members in the New York area.



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